

**Introduction to Cultural Studies**  
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**Lecture - 08**  
**George Orwell's Shooting An Elephant (Part - III)**

Hello and welcome to the final lecture on George Orwell's Shooting an Elephant which we are covering in this NPTEL course entitled, Introduction to Cultural Studies. Now we had already covered a significant section of the essay and today we are just going to conclude the essay by looking at the final section and obviously the key questions that the essay asks are the relationship between cultural identity and agency which we have spent some time already.

So this essay as I mentioned in couple of lectures previously is a dramatization, is a drama about the crisis of agency in a particular cultural condition, the crisis of identity formation and a particular cultural formation. So we talked about how the hegemonic identity over here becomes sort of comes to be consumed by its own hegemony. How the hegemonic identity becomes powerless precisely because it is powerful.

Because you know if you are powerful all the time, if you are expected to be powerful all the time then you end up being powerless because you do not have the option of not being powerful. This is what the essay dramatizes in a very spectacular way.

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- It was perfectly clear to me what I ought to do. I ought to walk up to within, say, twenty-five yards of the elephant and test his behavior. If he charged, I could shoot; if he took no notice of me, it would be safe to leave him until the mahout came back. But also I knew that I was going to do no such thing. I was a poor shot with a rifle and the ground was soft mud into which one would sink at every step. If the elephant charged and I missed him, I should have about as much chance as a toad under a steam-roller. But even then I was not thinking particularly of my own skin, only of the watchful yellow faces behind.

And there is a associated claustrophobia that comes with agency listeners, the associated neuroticism. It is very neurotic kind of an essay which you know it becomes more and more nervous. It becomes more and more ambivalent. The narrator becomes more and more ambivalent and obviously as I mentioned this is a much older Orwell looking back retrospectively at a much younger Orwell.

And so it is a much older, more matured self, commenting on something which happened many years before when he was relatively inexperienced and callous and did not quite know what to do. So this is the final bit of the essay which is on your screen right now. This is where he is looking at the elephant and this is where he is sort of speculating whether or not to shoot the elephant and he realizes increasingly that he ought not to shoot the elephant.

Because the elephant is perfectly harmless and its attack of mast which is a hormonal excitement which he was experiencing is going away and is beginning to become tame and domestic and harmless again and all that would take now is for the mahout to come back and take it back. But then he looks back and realizes that he is surrounded by people who are expecting him to shoot the elephant because he had so committed himself to the act the moment he called for the rifle.

And the moment he walked down the town with the rifle in his hand. So again this is going back to something which you would have perhaps explored already the construction of a signifier. The

signifier of white male's supremacy. When a white man walks on with a gun in the colonial space there is an automatic assumption of you know the performance of power, the articulation, the adulation of power.

And if you do not do it, if you come to that point walking downtown with a gun as a white man and then you walk back without committing without enacting the act then he end up really compromising the entire structure of power and that is something which is you know more and more helpful to protect. It is more important to protect rather than individual agency. So individual agency becomes completely redundant you know it becomes you know secondary, tertiary, absolutely redundant compared to these the macro agency of power.

So just going back to the essay and this is the section where we are looking at how he begins to become afraid but he is not afraid because it is his own personal safety. He is not afraid because he thinks he might be killed by the elephant which is perfectly possible. He is afraid rather that he will be found out to be not a great man. He will be found out to be you know not to be an intrepid Englishman, not to be an intrepid colonized a person but actually as an ambivalent nervous neurotic person but that he does not want to be found out.

That is the primary feel in the essay. That he do not want to be found out to be a nervous man because you know if you are found out as a nervous man then entire construct the entire signifier of the Sahib gets compromised and that is something which he cannot you know afford to so let happen okay. So this is the section where he says even then I was not thinking particularly of my own skin, only of the watchful yellow faces behind.

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- For at that moment, with the crowd watching me, I was not afraid in the ordinary sense, as I would have been if I had been alone. A white man mustn't be frightened in front of 'natives'; and so, in general, he isn't frightened. The sole thought in my mind was that if anything went wrong those two thousand Burmans would see me pursued, caught, trampled on and reduced to a grinning corpse like that Indian up the hill. And if that happened it was quite probable that some of them would laugh. That would never do.

For at that moment with the crowd watching me I was not afraid in the ordinary sense, as I would have been if I had been alone. So if you are alone in front of an elephant with a gun his primary feel would be for his own safety. His primary feel would be for his own security. His bodily safety, bodily security. But over here there was a greater fear at stake, there is a greater protection at stake you know that is he is fearing the protection.

He is afraid that he would not be able to protect now the safety of his own skin but the safety of the construct of the supremacy of the white man. That becomes more important that becomes a more important construct to be protected rather than the biological safety of his own self. So this is what he says and this is a very important quotation of the essay where he says, a white man must not be frightened in front of the natives and so in general he is not frightened.

The sole thought in my mind was that if anything went wrong those two thousand Burmans would see me pursued, caught, trampled on and reduced to a grinning corpse like that Indian up the hill. And if that happened it was quite probable that some of them would laugh. That would never do. So again see the reference to the grinning corpse of the Indian which had appeared before.

It was a very morbid image uh grotesque image of a man so crushed into the ground and obviously killed in the process and ends up grinning as a corpse. It sounds like a grotesque,

perverse parody of the solemnity of death of the solemnity of burial etc. And he is saying over here that if the elephant do the same thing with me then I will be reduced to the grinning corpse as that Indian up the hill and that would never do because then the people around me would laugh at me.

And again the whole point comes back not so much involve the protection of his own skin, protection of his own biological body but of the ideological body around, the discursive body around him which obviously promotes the supremacy of the white man and that supremacy must not be compromised before this crowd which had gathered behind him. So in other words a spectacle has been created and now the spectacular act must be done you know and this spectacular act obviously is the shooting of the elephant.

Now I did mention at some point previously but this becomes in a very grotesque sense a parody of the imperial hunting narrative. A, imperial hunting narrative was so designed to sort of promote the supremacy of the white man. It was designed to sort of promote the machismo of the white man. You know the white man capturing or hunting the wild animal became some kind of an allegory of colonialism to a certain extent.

Now obviously this is not something which is similar but there is a structural similarity but at the same time it is functionally completely different thematically and essentially completely different. He does not want to shoot the elephant. It is not even wild. It is a domestic elephant which has become momentarily mad and he realizes that you know there is no point shooting him. It is completely useless, barbaric, inhuman to shoot the elephant.

But he has to because the crowd around him has gathered and the people around him and he describe them in very racist terms, yellow faces, yellow crowd of people behind him and they all gathered with the expectation, the sole expectation that he was going to shoot the elephant now and now there is no going back from this point. So the whole idea over here is not to become a laughable subject, an object of laughter right. The white man must never be laughed at.

The white man must be worshipped all the time. The white man must be obeyed all the time. Now that discourse, that narrative of being obeyed, of being worshiped obviously is a construct of colonialism and that construct must be protected at all cost. Now even that means he have to go against your agency that means you have to go against the own human will. So be it and that is the whole idea of cultural construction.

And that is the reason why we are looking at this essay so carefully because the cultural constructs of identity the constructions of identity often come at the cost of your personal will, of your personal biological existential will which sometimes have to be subverted, negated, made redundant in order for the bigger cultural signifier to be enacted and over here that is exactly what is happening.

The bigger cultural signifier is the white man, the white sahib and that becomes more important, a far more important construct that needs protection rather than a man George Orwell you know who is completely replaceable by any other white man. He is just a white man, but the white man is a white man and a white man must behave like a white man.

If he does not behave like a white man he compromises the entire colonial machinery and that must never happen. In other words he must never be laughed at okay because laughing at would really be a complete destruction of the discursive supremacy you know heroism, machismo that a white man is expected to enact in a colonial space okay.

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- There was only one alternative. I shoved the cartridges into the magazine and lay down on the road to get a better aim. The crowd grew very still, and a deep, low, happy sigh, as of people who see the theatre curtain go up at last, breathed from innumerable throats. They were going to have their bit of fun after all. The rifle was a beautiful German thing with cross-hair sights. I did not then know that in shooting an elephant one would shoot to cut an imaginary bar running from ear-hole to ear-hole. I ought, therefore, as the elephant was sideways on, to have aimed straight at his ear-hole, actually I aimed several inches in front of this, thinking the brain would be further forward.

So there was only one alternative. I shoved the cartridges into the magazine and lay down on the road to get a better aim. Now obviously over here he is doing something which goes entirely against his own will. He does not want to shoot the elephant but he does not have any option. So there is just one alternative he is forced to commit himself to the act. The crowd grew very still and a deep low happy sigh as of people who see the theatre curtain go up at last, breathed from innumerable throats. So again look at the metaphors over here.

The metaphors here are completely theatrical which basically is a pointer to the performativity of the whole act. It is a very performative act. It is performative because it is not you know excessive it is larger than life, it is spectacular in quality and it is designed to create a certain effect right the effective way is one of heroism, the effective way is the supremacy of the white man you know the awe one must have for the white man.

That must be you know produced that effect must be produced out of this particular act. So the behavior of the crowd over here is very reflective of the idea of consumption. So the crowd over here has come to consume the supremacy of the white man. It becomes a bit of a circus show, a spectacular circus show, a real life circus really where the white man comes.

He performs an act which is performative in the sense that it is excessive, designed to generate an effect etc. And the people around him, the crowd around him they have come to consume the

effect of the particular act. So the theater metaphors over here are very deliberately and strategically chosen by the narrator in order to really give you the sense of the full impact of what he was going through at that point of time.

They were going to have their bit of fun after all. So the bit of fun over here, the tamasha over here is basically the white man doing something that white man must do, kill an elephant, kill something which is potentially anarchic. So all the people have come together and so they are expecting him to shoot the elephant and they have come to gather to consume this spectacular quality of the act.

So the bit of fun over here is a spectacular quality, the performative quality of the act of shooting the elephant which obviously is something it does completely going against his own will. The rifle was a beautiful German thing with cross-hair sights. I did not then know that in shooting an elephant one would shoot to cut an imaginary bar running from ear-hole to ear-hole. I ought therefore as the elephant was sideways on to have aimed straight at his ear-hole.

Actually I aimed several inches in front of this thinking the brain would be further forward. So you know he is giving you a very graphic description of the point of contact that he made with the, with his shooting. He realizes now and this is again example of retrospective narration. He is sort of looking back at the whole idea, the whole event and telling you the things which had gone wrong, which could have gone wrong revealing to you his inexperience at that point of time.

Right, so he shot at the wrong point. He did not shoot at the ideal point while shooting the elephant. He says one ought to shoot a point a particular you know place in the elephant's anatomy. He obviously targeted somewhere else as a result of which something went wrong. The elephant did not really die the way he would have died normally, right. And again, if you look at the, and we will look at the description of the death of the elephant, he ends with shooting the elephant but not killing the elephant and therein lies the difference.

So that is the reason why the essay is called Shooting an Elephant. So again that dichotomy, the gap between shooting and killing that also reveals his lack of agency. He comes and shoots the



elephant but he does not really kill it. The elephant dies much later. It does a very gradual, painful death; a very slow, gradual, painful death. And again there is a point in the essay where he keeps shooting the elephant to help it die but the elephant does not die.

Because you know he is shooting at the wrong places and again that is reflective of the crisis of his agency. I mean it does not really have an agency, it comes and shoots the elephant but does not really kill it, right. And it becomes very grotesque, very perverse parody of agency in a colonial space okay and we will look at that in a moment. And now he is describing the entire the experience the phenomenal experience of really shooting the elephant and how he felt at that point of time.

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- When I pulled the trigger I did not hear the bang or feel the kick — one never does when a shot goes home — but I heard the devilish roar of glee that went up from the crowd. In that instant, in too short a time, one would have thought, even for the bullet to get there, a mysterious, terrible change had come over the elephant. He neither stirred nor fell, but every line of his body had altered. He looked suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old, as though the frightful impact of the bullet had paralysed him without knocking him down. At last, after what seemed a long time — it might have been five seconds, I dare say — he sagged flabbily to his knees. His mouth slobbered.

When I pulled the trigger I did not hear the bang or feel the kick. One never does when a shot goes home. But I heard the devilish roar of glee that went up from the crowd. Again look at the metaphors, devilish the Burmese people are devilish by default. The yellow faces you know they are monstrous, they are subhuman species. Again the rhetoric over here is very racist but then of course we have to understand that this is written at a time when you know racism was not really you know looked down upon. It was completely sanctioned.

This is a colonial officer talking about the colonized native people. It does not have people adequately correct. And this particular essay is not meant to be read by the Asian's later on but

people like us today we are looking at it and critiquing it and you know realizing how racism is but then the political important point of the essay is the fact that it is so politically incorrect as I mentioned before that you know that he does not really care. He is telling you exactly how it fell.

So on one hand he is telling you imperialism is a terrible thing. It is a barbaric activity. Is an entire enterprise of exploitation. There is nothing noble about it. But at the same time he is also telling you the people around us and the Burmese people or Asian people over here are complete devilish people, yellow face people with no sense of direction, no sense of propriety etc. So you know this is what I mean when I said in the beginning he is stuck between two orders of hatred.

One a bigger ideological hatred and a more immediate visceral hatred, right. So he is not really being politically correct at all. So the devilish roar of glee that went up from the crowd and in that instant in too short a time one would have thought even for the bullet to get there, a mysterious terrible change had come over the elephant. He neither stirred nor fell but every line of his body had altered.

He looked suddenly stricken, shrunken immensely old, as though the frightful impact of the bullet had paralyzed him without knocking him down. At last, after what seemed a long time it might have been five seconds, I dare say, he sagged flabbily on his knees. His mouth slobbered.

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- An enormous senility seemed to have settled upon him. One could have imagined him thousands of years old. I fired again into the same spot. At the second shot he did not collapse but climbed with desperate slowness to his feet and stood weakly upright, with legs sagging and head drooping. I fired a third time. That was the shot that did for him. You could see the agony of it jolt his whole body and knock the last remnant of strength from his legs. But in falling he seemed for a moment to rise, for as his hind legs collapsed beneath him he seemed to tower upward like a huge rock toppling, his trunk reaching skyward like a tree. He trumpeted, for the first and only time. And then down he came, his belly towards me, with a crash that seemed to shake the ground even where I lay.

An enormous senility seemed to have settled upon him. One could have imagined him thousands of years old. So what happens over here is very interesting. He gives you a very decelerated description of the dying elephant. Everything slows down. There is a process of retardation that happens over here. Everything becomes magnified. It is like a slow motion in cinema, right with things that slow down, magnified for effect.

And we have the same kind of that effect over here in this particular section of the essay where he describes in very graphic and gory details of the elephant which is gradually dying. So it did not stir. He just began to slubber after a point of time and then it began to look very senile as a great senility had descended on him and his body changed, his appearance changed completely and became more and more weak.

He became more and more sort of flabby and he sort of at the end of it after many seconds, it may have been 5 seconds in terms of clock time but it seemed to him an infinity and final such time for the elephant began to fall gradually. I fired again into the same spot. I fired again into the same spot. At the second shot he did not collapse but climbed with desperate slowness to his feet and stood weakly upright with legs sagging and head drooping.

I fired a third time. That was the shot that did for him. You could see the agony of it jolt his whole body and knock the last remnant of strength from his legs. But in falling he seemed for a moment to rise for as his hind legs collapsed beneath him he seemed to tower upward like a huge tock toppling, his trunk reaching skyward like a tree. He trumpeted for the first and only time. And then down he came, his belly towards me with a crash that seemed to shake the ground even where I lay.

Now, it is possible for us to read this entire episode as a very interesting allegory, a very complex and grotesque allegory of the annihilation of agency. I mean the dying elephant becomes as dying agency. So there seems to be some kind of an empathy between him and the elephant at this point of time. He seems to connect with the elephant and he seems to be really moved by the dying elephant even as he is shooting the elephant.

So in a way the elephant becomes, the dying elephant becomes really an allegory, really an extension, an extra realization of this dying agency at this point of time. And he can still connect to it and he can feel the pain and it is a very painful process for him as well because the elephant keeps on dying. It does not really die immediately. It takes enormous amount of time to die and that again is the dichotomy that schism I talked about little while earlier; the difference between shooting and killing.

He keeps shooting the elephant but then at a point of time comes in shooting, his shots make no difference at all. The elephant was dying in his own time and his shots you know failed to make any difference at that point of time, right. So the elephant crushed and you know it seemed to shake the ground beneath his feet and you know and he could see the very decelerated, slow motion of the elephant dying in front of him and like I said it may have been 5 seconds in terms of clock time but that does not matter.

What really matters is the psychological time that he is inhabiting at that stage. And the entire essay is a retrospective narration but he manages to recapture the entire experiential uh experientiality of the event, right. The entire experience that he went through at that point of time.

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- I got up. The Burmans were already racing past me across the mud. It was obvious that the elephant would never rise again, but he was not dead. He was breathing very rhythmically with long rattling gasps, his great mound of a side painfully rising and falling. His mouth was wide open — I could see far down into caverns of pale pink throat. I waited a long time for him to die, but his breathing did not weaken. Finally I fired my two remaining shots into the spot where I thought his heart must be. The thick blood welled out of him like red velvet, but still he did not die.

I got up. The Burmans were already racing past me across the mud. It was obvious that the elephant would never rise again, but he was not dead and this is the whole point. He did not die immediately but he was dying, right. And the difference between dying and being dead over here is dramatized; that gap has been dramatized deliberately by Orwell. He was breathing very rhythmically with long rattling gasps, his great mound of a side painfully rising and falling.

His mouth was wide open. I could see far down into caverns of pale pink throat. So the descriptions become more and more graphic and also look at the way he is humanizing the elephant you know. The pronouncement of his, the body anatomy is described in a way as if the human anatomy and you know it becomes almost a murder for him, right and the word murder does appear in the essay. There is difference between murder and killing now.

If you murder someone there is a degree of you know the automatic implication is it is a human being you are killing, right. It is an act of crime. It is an act of sin perhaps if you look at it from a more you know sacred religious perspective. But over here the word murder has also appeared which goes on to show the extent to which he was unwilling to carry out this particular act okay. So he could see, I could see far down into caverns of pale pink throat.

I waited for a long time for him to die but his breathing did not weaken. Finally I fired my two remaining shots into the spot where I thought his heart must be. The thick blood welled out of him like red velvet, but still he did not die. His body did not even jerk when the shots hit him and the tortured breathing continued without a pause. He was dying very slowly and in great agony but in some world remote from me where even not even a bullet could damage him further.

And this is the point where the dramatization between shooting and killing begins to become very apparent. And he is wanting to shoot the elephant, he wants to kill the elephant you know just relieve the elephant from its agony but he cannot do it and he keeps on fighting, he keeps on firing, he keeps on shooting but that does not make any difference at all because he says the elephant was dying in some other world where not even the bullets can touch him any further.

Now, this again becomes a very paradoxical crisis of agency. Now at this point of time he wants to kill the elephant. He wants to get rid of the elephant in a sense that he wants the elephant to be relieved of its agony this very painful process of dying. But he cannot seem to make any difference at all. And this idea of not being able to make any difference that extends the entire crises of agency of the essay. It is traumatizing at this point of time.

Now he is a white man with a gun. He is notionally the supreme person, the supreme signifier of power but look at his powerlessness. A, he is forced to do something he does not want to do. He is forced to shoot an elephant. He does not want to shoot the elephant but he has to do it. He has powerlessness once and secondly and more grotesquely he now wants to kill the elephant because he wants to relieve the elephant of its agony.

And he cannot do it because he keeps shooting the elephant on wrong places and elephant does not die. He just takes a lot of time and the entire process of dying is magnified and decelerated and slows down and that becomes more graphic for him, that becomes more psychologically unnerving for him and that unsettles him even more okay. So this idea of dying and being dead that has been dramatized and that further extends his crisis of agency which has been dramatized throughout the essay okay.

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- His body did not even jerk when the shots hit him, the tortured breathing continued without a pause. He was dying, very slowly and in great agony, but in some world remote from me where not even a bullet could damage him further. I felt that I had got to put an end to that dreadful noise. It seemed dreadful to see the great beast lying there, powerless to move and yet powerless to die, and not even to be able to finish him. I sent back for my small rifle and poured shot after shot into his heart and down his throat. They seemed to make no impression. The tortured gasps continued as steadily as the ticking of a clock.

So I felt that I had got to put an end to that dreadful noise. It seemed dreadful to see the great beast lying there powerless to move and yet powerless to die. So again the word powerless appears twice and as I mentioned the powerlessness of the elephant becomes an ex-realization of the powerlessness of Orwell the man over here. So there is a degree of empathy that he connects, he establishes with the elephant that you know the elephant was powerless to die.

It is stuck in a very liminal limbo state between life and death but at the same time he is not really, you know these two is not going to live again but he is not dying yet right. So he is not dead yet. So he is dying. So there is a process of becoming and unbecoming that is happening over here. And one could read the existential location of Orwell in very similar terms right. So he does not want to be there.

He did not want to shoot the elephant but at the same time he had shot the elephant but he did not kill the elephant. So again he is somewhat stuck between you know different categories of action and he does not quite know how to locate himself. So his dislocation and the elephant's liminality between life and death are somehow connected at the structural level and that makes him more empathetic towards the elephant at this point right.

So I sent back for my small rifle and poured shot after shot into his heart and down his throat. They seemed to make no impression. The tortured gasps continued as steadily as the ticking of a clock right. So the ticking of a clock is like a little uh in a passage of time and the tortured breathing of the elephant accompanied like tickling of the clock and his you know incessant shooting of the elephant did not make any difference at all at this point of time.

So he called for a small rifle and went you know very close to the elephant, pulled the shots into his mouth one after the other but that did not make any difference at all right. And again, this becomes a spectacular example of his crisis of agency that he wants to kill the elephant now but he cannot do it, right. So he shot the elephant but that is about it really. He is supposed to shoot the elephant and then that is it.

His agency has been inactive and now any further act you know does not make any difference and that makes him even more agencyless. And his agencylessness becomes very spectacular and very evident at this point of time okay.

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- In the end I could not stand it any longer and went away. I heard later that it took him half an hour to die. Burmans were bringing dash and baskets even before I left, and I was told they had stripped his body almost to the bones by the afternoon. Afterwards, of course, there were endless discussions about the shooting of the elephant. The owner was furious, but he was only an Indian and could do nothing.

In the end I could not stand it any longer and went away. I heard later that it took him half an hour to die. The Burmans were bringing dash and baskets even before I left. And I was told they had stripped his body almost to the bones by the afternoon. So the Burmese people apparently came and stripped the elephant to its bones and took away all the meat and again the description of the Burmese people over here sort of cross-eye cannibalistic culture is very problematic you know.

You know he seems to know exactly uh what everyone of these Burmese people, what each of these Burmese people want. He seemed to know exactly that all wanted him to shoot the elephant. He seemed to know exactly that they all wanted the meat of the elephant now. This totalizing assumptions is very problematic and you know like I said no Burmese men or woman speak in his essay.

There is no Burmese voice over here. It is entirely a white man's idea of Burmese culture. It is entirely the white man's idea of Burmese desire. And he is assuming and totalizing and describing you know speaking for the Burmese right. So we need to be cautious about taking this



essay in two liberal alight, right. There are prominences in this essay. There are some definite degrees of racism in the essay if you are measuring by modern standards that we need to be aware of.

You know we need to be guarded you know before becoming too celebratory of you know Orwell the left wing intellectual way here. Because what he is doing essentially is he is essentializing and he is speaking for the Burmese. He is describing the Burmese in very totalizing terms and he is he seems to know exactly what the Burmese want, what the Burmese did and there is no complexity.

All the complexity, all the ambivalence, all the uncertainty, the attractive ambivalence and uncertainty are located entirely in the white man, right. There is no answer to date that is conferred or given or offered or you know used to describe the Burmese people. He is absolutely certain what the Burmese people are, what they want, what they have done and etc. And that is deeply problematic discursive racist ideological cultural levels. I mean to be aware of that before it become too celebratory of this essay right.

And then we conclude this essay, the last section, afterwards of course, there were endless discussion about the shooting of the elephant. The owner was furious but he was only an Indian and could do nothing. Again, the question of agency comes in. This is notional agency at work, theoretical agency at work right. The owner of the elephant was an Indian and could do nothing because he was just an Indian.

But we already seen that the white man who is notionally full of agency also could do nothing but had to shoot the elephant, right. So the question of agency have been turned on his head and we had seen how the entire essay had described it or dramatized it. But now we are back to being notional. We are back to being normative, right. The act has been done, the rupture has happened and now this seems to have been sown in again, right.

And now the owner being an Indian is notionally agencyless. Orwell, the white man is notionally full of agency. So the notional parameters, the normative parameters are sort of brought back again. They have been restored again.

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- Besides, legally I had done the right thing, for a mad elephant has to be killed, like a mad dog, if its owner fails to control it. Among the Europeans opinion was divided. The older men said I was right, the younger men said it was a damn shame to shoot an elephant for killing a coolie, because an elephant was worth more than any damn Coringhee coolie. And afterwards I was very glad that the coolie had been killed; it put me legally in the right and it gave me a sufficient pretext for shooting the elephant. I often wondered whether any of the others grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking a fool.

Besides, legally I had done the right thing, for a mad elephant has to be killed like a mad dog if its owner fails to control it. Among the Europeans opinion was divided. The older men said that I was right, the younger men said it was a damn shame to shoot an elephant for killing a coolie because an elephant was worth more than any damn Coringhee coolie and this division is important. The younger men over here they take it at a very literal level to say the elephant costs more than a coolie. So you should not have shot the elephant.

You should not kill the elephant. It was a damn shame you killed the elephant because what is a coolie compared to an elephant. Now the older men have seemed to have said that you know you did the right thing by shooting the elephant. Now there is a very interesting reading you can do about it. We talked about reification already, the Marxist idea of reification or commodification. Now there are two commodities at stake over here.

The first commodity is what the younger white men wanted to protect and that is the cost of the elephant right. And they are comparing the commodity cost at a very literal surface superficial

level right and is saying the elephant costs more than a coolie so you should have protected the elephant more than you protected the coolie.

But the older men over here who would spend more time in the colonial space or presumably wiser they say you have done the right thing by shooting the elephant because they realize that the greater commodity at stake over here is the supremacy of the white man. That is the matter commodity which is priceless and that must be protected at all cost, right. So the suggestion over here is you did the right thing as a white man to shoot the elephant.

Because you protected the commodity status, the hyper-commodity, the meta-commodity status of the white man's supremacy and that needs to be protected above and beyond any other commodity in the colonial space, right. So they say it was a right thing to do. So that was a division and that division is quite revealing. It sort of reveals before us a very superficial idea of commodification and a more deep, a more sinister idea of commodification which is at work in a colonial space, right.

And afterwards I was very glad that the coolie had been killed. It put me legally in the right and it gave me a sufficient pretext for shooting the elephant. So you know he say all the boxes have been ticked, the coolie have been killed by the elephant so obviously I was legally in the right in terms of shooting the elephant and the right thing legally speaking. I often wondered whether any of the others grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking a fool.

And that is the final sentence with which the essay ends and the whole idea is you know he realizes he so tells himself that I hope no one found out that I shot the elephant primarily because I did not want to be found out to be a fool, right. Because I did not want to be laughed at. I did not want to be mocked at, jeered at. I wanted to protect my respect. I wanted to protect my signifier status as a white man, right.

And this idea of being a fool, this idea of being found out as a fool reveals before us the hollowness or the construct of the white man's supremacy. And the entire essay becomes a dramatization of the hollowness. He realizes it is a very hollow construct. He realizes that the

entire idea of supremacy of the white man is a very superficial construct which has been replicated endlessly and has become permanent in the colonial space.

But actually it did not crack up every second, any second, right. So the entire idea, the entire episode of shooting the elephant having to do it against his own will that had revealed before him the constructive quality of the white man's supremacy which is actually something which will crack up any second, right. He came very close to cracking up. He came very close to sort of realizing that he is basically being stripped of the security of a signifier status.

And then he realizes in the end that you know I had only done the act. I had only shot the elephant in order to avoid looking like a fool. And I wondered whether anyone else have found out that as well. So and this concludes the essay. Now, this is the section, these are references that are useful for you in terms of quoting or citing and if you want to read any further there are the collected essays and journalism and letters of George Orwell which you can read.

There are quite a few essays on Burma, of his experiences in Burma as a colonial police officer that might be very useful, very interesting for you to read for this particular course. Now, the reason why we did this essay in such details in this course, obviously this is a great essay about cultural construction of identities. So we look at identity and the cultural conditions this essay becomes a very graphic reminder of how identities are constructed, reconstructed and sometimes potentially deconstructed in certain cultural conditions.

And how when the conditions change the identities will also change and how identities sort of come with certain baggage of expectations, performative expectations. Expectations of enactings and performances which must be carried on because you become a carrier of certain identities and those identities demand certain actions from you, certain events from you, certain performances from you, right.

And if you do not carry out these performances you, you know you end up compromising your identity. So the very flimsy the very superficial idea of identity is dramatized in this particular essay; the whole idea of supremacy, superior identity is basically a construct and a very hollow

construct. So the entire essay is about hollowness. The only persona over here is not someone that you should hero worship, is not someone that you should celebrate and look up to. He is a very cynical, hollow, hypocritical man, right.

For all his hatred against imperialism, for all his hatred against the empire and you know the exploited machinery of imperialism he ends up doing what imperialism wants him to do because he is on the payroll of the imperial machinery, right. So with all his cynicism, with all his ambivalence, with all his uncertainty he ends up replicating what every white man must do in a colonial space with the difference that he gives you an idea as a reader what he went through at that point of time.

What the uncertainty, the ambivalence, the agony he went through at that point of time but at the end he ended up doing it. So the entire revelation, the entire epiphany became quite purposeless in the end; it became quite superfluous in the end. So the entire essay become a drama of superfluity, of hollowness, of hypocrisy, right; of cynicism to a great extent. And again the prominence in the essay as I mentioned already that no Burmese men or women are given a voice in this essay.

The entire essay is narrated by a white man who seems to know exactly what the Burmese people wanted, what the Burmese people expected and that becomes quite problematic in terms of the representational politics that the essay sort of appropriates. So I hope you enjoyed the essay. I hope you found the essay useful in terms of looking at how cultural studies, a very serious study of culture can reveal to us how identities, agency, you know social performances, cultural performances are enacted in different conditions oftentimes going against the will of the self, going against the instinct of the biological body.

How the culture will, how the sort of political will, social will, discursive will, these become more important than the biological instincts of preservation, fear etc., right. So we conclude this essay and then we move on to the next text in the next lecture. Thank you for your attention and I will see you in the next lecture.